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### Rhyme and reason

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**Rhyme and Reason:  
The Homeric Translations of Dryden, Pope, and Morris**  
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**Abstract**

Through a consideration of Alexander Pope's *Iliad* (1715–20), John Dryden's "The Last Parting of Hector and Andromache" (1693), and William Morris' *Odyssey* (1887), this chapter asks how poetic form, and specifically rhyme, in these translations interacts with Homeric scholarship and contemporary literary criticism. Beginning with Pope and Dryden, I investigate how the use of the rhyming couplet in both translations of Homer can give us an insight into the function of the Homeric formula, as well as perhaps providing a way into a closer translation of Homeric aesthetics. I then move to Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (1711), to reflect on the relationship between translation, poetry, and literary criticism, and the broader function of versification in the classification of poetry. Finally, I turn to Morris' 'Post-Wolf' translation of the *Odyssey*, asking why Morris revisited the rhyming couplet and how he innovated on it. I conclude by suggesting that, while Dryden and Pope used the rhyming couplet to attempt to recover a Homeric aesthetic based on an assumption of a unitarian Homer, and to shore up their own literary critical moves, Morris' translation practice can be related to his understanding of contemporary analytical classical scholarship – and, crucially, his own response to the epic tradition.

**I Prolegomenon**

Alexander Pope in the Preface to his translation of Homer's *Iliad* (1715–20) writes: "his measures, instead of being fetters to his sense, were always in readiness to run along with the warmth of his rapture, and even to give a farther representation of his notions, in the correspondence of their sounds to what they signify'd. Out of all these he has deriv'd that harmony, which makes us confess he had not only the richest head, but the finest ear in the world."<sup>1</sup> As for the Homeric poems' characteristic epithets, Pope "cannot but attribute these also to the fruitfulness of his [Homer's] invention."<sup>2</sup> The tenor of these remarks, and the assumption of a single author – Homer – makes clear that Pope's *Iliad* is a translation made Before Wolf.

In 1795 Friedrich August Wolf published his *Prolegomena ad Homerum*, which would come to be known as one of the founding works of classical philology as a discipline.<sup>3</sup> In its almost scientific rigor, its historicity and its concern for minutiae, philology was to be a discipline fundamentally at odds with poetry. As Turner (1997: 123) puts it, "Philologists wrested Homer from the world of poets and literature and placed him at the mercy of modern scientific criticism, just as they wrested the

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<sup>1</sup> The edition used is Shankman 1996. Here: p.10.

<sup>2</sup> Shankman (1996: 9).

<sup>3</sup> On Wolf's work and its importance to Homeric studies, see in particular Grafton 1981, Grafton 1985 (introduction), Donato 1986, Bertolini 1987.

Christian scriptures from the realm of sacred reverence.” The eighteenth century saw the crystallisation of the so-called Homeric Question, or rather Questions: did Homer really exist? Were the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* composed by one man? When were the Homeric poems written down, and can we ever get back to their original form?<sup>4</sup> In this chapter I will treat Pope’s *Iliad* and Dryden’s ‘The Last Parting of Hector and Andromache’ (1693) as valuable sources for an Unquestioned Homer, as attempts to, in Pope’s own words, “keep alive that spirit and fire which makes his chief character.”<sup>5</sup> I will focus on these writers’ treatment of particular features which would come to be recognised as characteristic of oral poetry: namely epithets and formulae. Both Dryden and Pope were composing in the rhyming heroic couplet, and it is the rhyming elements that will be central to my analysis as they come at the line end: the most common placement for oral-traditional metrical formulae.

If rhyme is, as Oscar Wilde wrote, “the one chord we have added to the Greek lyre,”<sup>6</sup> then can it perhaps capture something of which later After-Wolf translations, specifically those in free verse, have lost sight? When Post-Wolf translators revive the rhyming couplet (I use William Morris’ *Odyssey* as a case study), in what ways does their use of the rhyme scheme differ from that of their predecessors? And the broader questions: to what extent have shifts in Homeric scholarship affected the way we approach not only current translation practices but also, retrospectively, existing translations and their place in English literary history? What impact does poetic form, and specifically rhyme, have on the genre of a translation, and our recognition of it? And what difference does it make to all of these issues, when the translator is not only a poet, but also a literary critic?

## II Dryden, Pope, and the Heroic Couplet

Wolf’s *Prolegomena* was a watershed, a nodal point on the continuum of classical scholarship. His book made waves in not only the scholarly but also the literary community: Goethe, for example, decided to write an epic of his own, now that he would no longer be overshadowed by Homer.<sup>7</sup> However, this is not the whole picture. As Anthony Grafton (1981) has shown, there were *Prolegomena* to Wolf’s *Prolegomena*. The ideas Wolf put forward were based heavily on existing Biblical scholarship, and he articulated a strain of classical scholarship which had its roots in antiquity and had gradually gained strength over the course of the eighteenth century. It would be reductive, then, to treat Pope and Dryden as necessarily naïve readers of Homer – there was a commotion in scholarship, and we cannot assume they were unaware of it. Furthermore, the positive reaction to Wolf’s work was not unanimous. Not everyone was convinced in one fell swoop – even Goethe gave up on his epic, returning to his old belief in the Homeric poems’ unity and perfection. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in her 1856 epic *Aurora Leigh*, has the title character Aurora directly reject Wolf’s edition of Homer in her exploration of the

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<sup>4</sup> For overviews of the Homeric Question, see Turner 1997 and Fowler 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Shankman (1996: 20).

<sup>6</sup> ‘The Critic as Artist: Part I’, in Oscar Wilde, *the Major Works*, Oxford (1989: 244).

<sup>7</sup> See Grafton (1981: 110). On the Homeric Question and contemporary German literature and literary criticism, with a particular focus on Goethe, see Wohlleben 1967.

content and form of (female) epic poetry: “Wolff’s an atheist: / And if the Iliad fell out, as he says, / By mere fortuitous concourse of old songs, / Conclude as much too for the universe” (*Aurora Leigh* 5.1254–7).<sup>8</sup> The arguments of the Wolf school were not conclusive, and there was room for manoeuvre. In such a setting, we might see Pope as the last bastion of an earlier image of Homer – a stalwart champion of the so-called “Prince of Poets” in an age of change. As Lynch (1982: 11) argues, “The period marks not just the end of an old Homer and the birth of a new, but the death of a personal involvement with the literature of the past in favor of a more distanced and anthropological approach. Pope is the last translator of Homer to have a stake in the ancient world.” In his Preface, Pope brooks no argument. For him, Homer is not some nebulous tradition, oral poetry which at some point was committed to writing: he was a man, a man who “had the greatest *Invention* of any writer whatever.”<sup>9</sup>

Both Dryden and Pope compared their impressions of Homer with their impressions of Virgil. Dryden writes: “I have found by Trial, *Homer* a more pleasing task than *Virgil*, (though I say not the Translation will be less laborious). For the *Grecian* is more according to my Genius, than the *Latin* poet. In the Works of the two Authors we may read their Manners, and natural Inclinations, which are wholly different. *Virgil* was of a quiet, sedate Temper; *Homer* was violent, impetuous, and full of Fire.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Pope writes: “*Homer*, boundless and irresistible as *Achilles*, bears all before him, and shines more and more as the tumult increases; *Virgil*, calmly daring like *Aeneas*, appears undisturb’d in the midst of the action; disposes all about him, and conquers with tranquility.”<sup>11</sup> Both translators use the epic poems to learn about their poets: a strategy with a long pedigree as it formed the backbone of the ancient biographical tradition,<sup>12</sup> but which, come Wolf, would soon be considered redundant – at least on the Greek side. As Wolf himself puts it, “I little envy the facility – not to say credulity – of any who still seem to think that they read Homer and Hesiod as whole and pure as, for example, the Romans Virgil or Lucretius.”<sup>13</sup>

But in formulating such a comparison, Pope makes an important point. He writes: “*Homer* makes us hearers, and *Virgil* leaves us readers.”<sup>14</sup> Robert Fagles in the preface to his 1990 translation of the *Iliad* comments on Pope’s distinction between Homer and Virgil: “So the great translator of Homer, no doubt unknowingly, set at odds the claims of an oral tradition and those of a literary one, as we would call the two traditions now.”<sup>15</sup> It seems that Pope was onto something. Eighteenth-century Homeric studies planted the seeds of oral-traditional theory, a field of study which would later be taken over by the luminaries Milman Parry and Albert Lord and

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<sup>8</sup> On the development of female epic in connection to classical scholarship, see [chapter by Hauser].

<sup>9</sup> Shankman (1996: 3).

<sup>10</sup> From the Preface to his *Fables Ancient and Modern*, 1700. Edition: Kinsley 1958, lines 141–6.

<sup>11</sup> Shankman (1996: 11).

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Lefkowitz 2012, and work currently being conducted within the Durham-based ERC project ‘Living Poets’: [https://livingpoets.dur.ac.uk/w/Welcome\\_to\\_Living\\_Poets](https://livingpoets.dur.ac.uk/w/Welcome_to_Living_Poets).

<sup>13</sup> *Kleine Schriften in Lateinischer und Deutscher Sprache* 1.166, quoted in translation by Grafton in his introduction to Wolf’s *Prolegomena*, p.16.

<sup>14</sup> Shankman (1996: 8).

<sup>15</sup> Fagles (1990: ix).

would become the real turning point in our understanding of epic poetry.<sup>16</sup> The main tenet of this theory is that the Homeric poems were originally composed and transmitted orally, that is, through performance by rhapsodes. The implications of this theory for our interpretation of the poems are too many to mention here, but we might focus on one: the function of formulae. Formulaic elements in Homer range from individual epithets to entire type scenes repeated more or less verbatim. Athena is grey-eyed, Apollo swift-footed; descriptions of dressing and hospitality follow a set pattern; and speeches are introduced in a limited number of standard ways. In an oral setting, such stock elements can function to structure a performance, giving a rhapsode fixed points around which to improvise; they also provide hooks for the audience. Another function performed by formulae is a metrical one. The Homeric poems were composed in dactylic hexameter, and stock phrases, in particular noun-epithet pairings, could be used to fill a metrical gap. For example Achilles is described as swift-footed when he needs to fill up seven syllables (πόδας ὠκύς Ἀχιλλεύς) but as godlike Achilles, δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς, when he has to squeeze into five.<sup>17</sup>

Our understanding of these noun-epithet pairings has fluctuated over time. Before Wolf, they were generally considered to be a quirk of Homer, and therefore their particular purpose in any given situation was considered important, as symptomatic of Homer's genius. Pope writes that the use of epithets in the Homeric poems "heighten'd the *diction*...it assisted and fill'd the *numbers* with greater sound and pomp, and likewise conduced in some measure to thicken the *images*...I cannot but attribute these also to the fruitfulness of his [Homer's] invention, since (as he has manag'd them) they are a sort of supernumerary pictures of the persons or things to which they are join'd."<sup>18</sup> After Wolf, however, and even more so after Parry and Lord, they were often interpreted (and even dismissed) as mechanical elements of an anonymous oral tradition. Then in the latter part of the twentieth century, the debate came full circle when scholars again began to consider *particular* uses. Richard Martin in his introduction to Lattimore's translation of the *Iliad* sums up the current position: "The formulaic system is neither mechanical nor empty. It simply embodies an unfamiliar aesthetic: rather than the exquisite, right word, specially selected for each passage (a Romantic poetic requirement), epic style creates audience expectations by consistent depiction – and then, for maximum effect, at key moments, violates the norm."<sup>19</sup> We no longer dismiss formulae, but what do translators do with them, given their lack of familiarity to modern readers and their situatedness in a specific cultural context? Fagles in his translation treats them "in a flexible, discretionary way, not incompatible with Homer's way, I think – especially when his formulas are functional as well as fixed – while also answering to the ways we read today."<sup>20</sup> In the nineteenth century, the Reverend Theodore Alois Buckley wrote an up-to-date introduction to Pope's *Iliad*, in which he summarised

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<sup>16</sup> See in particular Lord 1960, Parry 1987.

<sup>17</sup> This is to simplify drastically the issue. For a detailed analysis of Homeric formulae, see the series of articles by Mark W. Edwards published in *Oral Tradition* (Edwards 1986, 1988, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> Shankman (1996: 9).

<sup>19</sup> Lattimore (1991: 51).

<sup>20</sup> Fagles (1990: x).

the latest scholarship on the Homeric Question. He declared: “It would be absurd, therefore, to test Pope’s translation by our own advancing knowledge of the original text. We must be content to look at it as a most delightful work in itself – a work which is as much a part of English literature as Homer himself is of Greek.”<sup>21</sup> I am not convinced that we should deliberately ignore developments in classical scholarship in order to read Pope – to pretend to be naïve, as it were. As I have suggested in relation to Grafton’s re-reading of Wolf and his predecessors, it is likely that Pope himself was not as ‘naïve’ as we might think. But it may be true that our “advancing knowledge,” our attempts to make Homer “answer to the ways we read today,” could be obscuring our appreciation of the original in some respects: in particular, as I hope to show, in aesthetic terms.

The passage on which I shall focus my analysis in this section comes from Book 6 of the *Iliad*. Hector is about to head into battle, but his wife Andromache entreats him to stay back: and the passage I shall be discussing is the first part of Hector’s reply. There is nothing special about the passage in terms of metre or formulae – nothing I will say here is unique to this passage. But Dryden only translated Book I and part of Book VI of the *Iliad*, which limits the comparative material available. In fact Pope comments on this sad state of affairs, though his remark seems more than a little barbed: “It is a great loss to the poetical world that Mr. *Dryden* did not live to translate the *Iliad*. He has left us only the first book and a small part of the sixth; in which if he has in some places not truly interpreted the sense, or preserved the antiquities, it ought to be excused on account of the haste he was obliged to write in.”<sup>22</sup>

τὴν δ' αὖτε προσέειπε μέγας κορυθαιόλος Ἔκτωρ·  
 “ἦ καὶ ἐμοὶ τάδε πάντα μέλει, γύναι· ἀλλὰ μάλ' αἰνῶς  
 αἰδέομαι Τρῶας καὶ Τρωάδας ἑλκεσιπέπλους,  
 αἳ κε κακὸς ὥς νόσφιν ἀλυσκάζω πολέμοιο.  
 οὐδέ με θυμὸς ἄνωγεν, ἐπεὶ μάθον ἔμμεναι ἐσθλός  
 αἰεὶ καὶ πρῶτοισι μετὰ Τρώεσσι μάχεσθαι,  
 ἀρνύμενος πατρός τε μέγα κλέος ἢ δ' ἐμὸν αὐτοῦ.  
 εὖ μὲν ἐγὼ τόδε οἶδα κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν·  
 ἔσσεται ἡμαρ ὅτ' ἂν ποτ' ὀλώλῃ Ἴλιος ἱρὴ  
 καὶ Πριάμος καὶ λαὸς ἐϋμμελίῳ Πριάμοιο·  
 ἀλλ' οὐ μοι Τρώων τόσσον μέλει ἄλγος ὀπίσσω,  
 οὔτ' αὐτῆς Ἑκάβης οὔτε Πριάμοιο ἀνακτος  
 οὔτε κασιγνήτων, οἳ κεν πολέες τε καὶ ἐσθλοί  
 ἐν κονίῃσι πέσοιεν ὑπ' ἀνδράσι δυσμενέεσσιν,  
 ὅσσον σεῖ', ὅτε κέν τις Ἀχαιῶν χαλκοχιτώνων  
 δακρυόεσσαν ἄγῃται, ἐλεύθερον ἡμαρ ἀπούρας.

*Iliad* 6.440–55 (my emphasis)<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Buckley (1884: 29).

<sup>22</sup> Shankman (1996: 20).

<sup>23</sup> In this chapter, the *Iliad* text used is the Teubner edition of M.L. West (vol. 1 1998, vol. 2 2000), and the *Odyssey* text is that of H. van Thiel (1991).

Highlighted are the noun-epithet pairings. They are formulaic phrases, each repeated a number of times in the *Iliad*: μέγας κορυθαίολος Έκτωρ appears twelve times (κορυθαίολος Έκτωρ alone occurs 37 times); Τρωάδας έλκεσιπέπλους three times; μέγα κλέος three times in the *Iliad*, five in the *Odyssey*; Ίλιος ίγή an impressive 22 times (plus two mentions in the *Odyssey*); έϋμμελίω Πριάμοιο four times (in all cases the entire line is repeated); Πριάμοιο άνακτος eight times (and once in the *Odyssey*); άνδράσι δυσμενέεσσιν nine times in the *Iliad*, six in the *Odyssey*; and Άχαιών χαλκοχιτώνων 22 times (plus twice in the *Odyssey*). The obvious trend to extrapolate is that all but one of these eight examples comes at the end of a line (μέγα κλέος being the exception). How does this compare to, in the first instance, modern free verse translations? I focus here on the translations by Robert Fagles and Richard Lattimore, as those arguably most familiar to readers, most used by students, and most widely circulated.<sup>24</sup>

Then tall Hektor of the shining helm answered her: “All these things are in my mind also, lady; yet I would feel deep shame before the Trojans, and the Trojan women with trailing garments, if like a coward I were to shrink aside from the fighting; and the spirit will not let me, since I have learned to be valiant and to fight always among the foremost ranks of the Trojans, winning for my own self great glory, and for my father. For I know this thing well in my heart, and my mind knows it: there will come a day when sacred Ilion shall perish, and Priam, and the people of Priam of the strong ash spear. But it is not so much the pain to come of the Trojans that troubles me, not even of Priam the king nor Hekabe, not the thought of my brothers who in their numbers and valor shall drop in the dust under the hands of men who hate them, as troubles me the thought of you, when some bronze-armored Achaian leads you off, taking away your day of liberty, in tears.

Lattimore 1951 (free six-beat line)<sup>25</sup>

And tall Hector nodded, his helmet flashing:  
 “All this weighs on my mind too, dear woman.  
 But I would die of shame to face the men of Troy  
 and the Trojan women trailing their long robes  
 if I would shrink from battle now, a coward.  
 Nor does the spirit urge me on that way.  
 I've learned it all too well. To stand up bravely,  
 always to fight in the front ranks of Trojan soldiers,

<sup>24</sup> There have of course been a number of more recent translations of the *Iliad*, such as that by Stephen Mitchell (2011, five-beat line) and, more recent still, that by Caroline Alexander (2015, free verse) – but these have yet to establish quite the same purchase as go-to translations.

<sup>25</sup> Lattimore (1991: 183), lines 440–56.

winning my father great glory, glory for myself.  
For in my heart and soul I also know this well:  
the day will come when sacred Troy must die,  
Priam must die and all his people with him,  
Priam who hurls the strong ash spear . . .

Even so,  
it is less the pain of the Trojans still to come  
that weighs me down, not even of Hecuba herself  
or King Priam, or the thought that my own brothers  
in all their numbers, all their gallant courage,  
may tumble in the dust, crushed by enemies —  
That is nothing, nothing beside your agony  
when some brazen Argive hales you off in tears,  
wrenching away your day of light and freedom!

Fagles 1990 (free five-/six-beat line)<sup>26</sup>

In both the Lattimore and Fagles translations, the Trojan women with their trailing garments and Priam of the strong ash spear are put at the end of the line – although in Fagles each takes an entire line all for itself. The hateful men are placed at the end, but sacred Ilion is not, and nor is lord Priam. Great Hector of the shining helmet is put at the beginning of the line by Lattimore, and Fagles splits up the epithets, with “tall,” for μέγας, at the beginning of the line, and κορυθαίολος, translated “his helmet flashing,” at the end. The bronze-clad Achaeans are in the middle of a line in Fagles, and in Lattimore run over to the following line. Both of these translations render the noun-epithet pairings fairly literally, but in adopting standard English word order the translators are often forced to abandon that of the Greek. Whilst this does succeed in making the translations comprehensible and accessible, when it comes to formulae something is lost. Noun-epithet pairings placed at the ends of lines are not, I would argue, simply a metrical filler. Aside from the contextually specific relevance which twentieth-century scholars put back into the arena, formulae also have an aesthetic value. κορυθαίολος Ἑκτωρ is repeated 37 times in the Homeric poems, Ἴλιος ἰρή and Ἀχαιῶν χαλκοχιτώνων 24 times apiece – they become memorable hooks, like a chorus or refrain coming round again and again. And they are metrically catchy. The Homeric hexameter is made up of six feet, each of which can be a dactyl or a spondee though the last two feet more often than not follow the structure dactyl-spondee. All the line-ending pairs in our passage take this form. The Homeric hexameter tends to avoid matching up the beginning of a word with the beginning of a metrical foot, so as not to give it too much of a sing-song lilt. However, when start of word and metrical ictus do coincide, it is again towards the end of a line, such as in Ἴλιος ἰρή, δυσμενέεσσιν or χαλκοχιτώνων.

So what, then, does the rhyming couplet have to offer?

The chief reply'd: That post shall be my care,  
Not that alone, but all the works of war.  
How would the sons of *Troy*, in arms renown'd,

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<sup>26</sup> Fagles (1990: 210), lines 521–41.



And *Troy's* proud dames whose garments sweep the ground,  
 Attaint the lustre of my former name,  
 Should *Hector* basely quit the field of fame?  
 My early youth was bred to martial pains,  
 My soul impels me to th' embattl'd plains:  
 Let me be foremost to defend the throne,  
 And guard my father's glories, and my own.  
 Yet come it will, the day decreed by fates;  
 (How my heart trembles while my tongue relates!)  
 The day when thou, Imperial *Troy!* must bend,  
 And see thy warriours fall, thy glories end.  
 And yet no dire presage so wounds my mind,  
 My mother's death, the ruin of my kind,  
 Not *Priam's* hoary hairs defil'd with gore,  
 Not all my brothers gasping on the shore;  
 As thine, *Andromache!* thy griefs I dread;  
 I see thee trembling, weeping, captive led!

Pope, *Iliad* 1715–20<sup>27</sup>

To whom the Noble *Hector* thus reply'd.

That and the rest are in my daily care;  
 But shou'd I shun the Dangers of the War,  
 With scorn the *Trojans* wou'd reward my pains,  
 And their proud Ladies with their sweeping Trains.  
 The *Grecian* Swords and Lances I can bear:  
 But loss of Honour is my only Fear.  
 Shall *Hector*, born to War, his Birth-right yield,  
 Belie his Courage and forsake the Field?  
 Early in rugged Arms I took delight;  
 And still have been the foremost in the Fight:  
 With dangers dearly have I bought Renown,  
 And am the Champion of my Father's Crown.

And yet my mind forebodes, with sure presage,  
 That *Troy* shall perish by the *Grecian* Rage.  
 The fatal Day draws on, when I must fall;  
 And Universal Ruine cover all.  
 Not *Troy* it self, tho' built by Hands Divine,  
 Nor *Priam*, nor his People, nor his Line,  
 My Mother, nor my Brothers of Renown,  
 Whose Valour yet defends th' unhappy Town,  
 Not these, nor all their Fates which I foresee,  
 Are half of that concern I have for thee.  
 I see, I see thee in that fatal Hour,

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<sup>27</sup> Shankman (1996: 310), lines 560–79.

Subjected to the Victor's cruel Pow'r:  
Led hence a Slave to some insulting Sword:

Dryden, 'The Last Parting of Hector and Andromache' 1693<sup>28</sup>

Pope does not claim to be producing a literal, word-for-word translation, and in fact argues: "Upon the whole, it will be necessary to avoid that perpetual repetition of the same epithets which we find in *Homer*." <sup>29</sup> In reading Dryden's and Pope's translations, it is not so easy to find great Hector of the shining helmet or the bronze-clad Achaeans – adherence to the Greek is more often than not sacrificed in favor of flowing English verse, and even the characteristic formulae might be lost in translation. However, I want to suggest that this flowing English verse that captures something that a more literal translation cannot. In using a rhyme scheme, both poets draw attention to the ends of their lines, and always finish on a metrical hook. The rhyme is catchy, just like the dactylic rhythm of a hexameter line. Most importantly, it is, like Homeric formulae, a prominent marker of "poeticity":<sup>30</sup> a trigger for genre recognition, which free verse lacks.<sup>31</sup> Occasionally the rhyme corresponds to the noun-epithet line end, as in the case of the Trojan women:

Pope: How would the sons of *Troy*, in arms renown'd,  
And *Troy's* proud dames whose garments sweep the ground,

Dryden: With scorn the *Trojans* wou'd reward my pains,  
And their proud Ladies with their sweeping Trains.

But my point is that it is not only when Pope and Dryden are being faithful to the Greek text that their translations capture something of Homer. In choosing the rhyming couplet, they were getting tantalisingly close to the cadence of the Homeric hexameter. For one thing, the heroic couplet is based on a principle of creative tension, by which "couplets formally involve a careful pairing of oppositions or balances but no formal resolution."<sup>32</sup> Each couplet has four units, with each line divided in two both by a caesura and by a grammatical relationship that implies cause and effect. Just so is a Homeric hexameter line split in the middle by a caesura, and the elements falling on either side might be in dialogue. In our passage, for example, the Trojan men are placed on one side, the Trojan women on the other; Hecabe on one side, and Priam on the other. Such a structure can draw even more attention to the line ends: in the first line of our passage, great Hector of the shining

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<sup>28</sup> Chambers *et al.* (1974: 428–9), lines 101–26.

<sup>29</sup> Shankman (1996: 18).

<sup>30</sup> See Hanauer 1996.

<sup>31</sup> On (sub-)genre recognition see Fowler 1982, Furniss/Bath 1996.

<sup>32</sup> Hunter (1996: 266). Connelly (1988: 359) attempts to use this oppositional structure of Pope's *Iliad* to uncover Pope's ideology, arguing that "Any writer takes for granted certain opposing themes and terms in order to give definition to what would otherwise be unclear. Pope's couplets with their characteristic rhetoric seem especially suited for generating oppositions, and so his versification facilitates a study of his assumptions."

helmet takes up the entire second half of the hexameter, the caesura falling just before μέγας.

In the rhyming couplet, the rhyming words are key to the focus and emphasis of the line. Hunter (1996: 266) comments (on Pope's "The Rape of the Lock," but it also applies here): "A pretty good close analysis of what is going on in the poem on a value level could be done just on the basis of rhyme words, irrespective of normal syntax or even of plot." One of the central themes of the Homeric passage is the μέγα κλέος, the great glory or great renown, that was the only exception to the line-end placement of noun-epithet pairings. Hector refuses to stay back from the fighting because he would be ashamed: ashamed of losing face with his people, and ashamed of undermining his father's and his own renown. At the end of the passage Hector says that the thing he fears most is that Andromache will be dragged off by the Achaeans. The ostensible chivalry and selflessness, however, is undermined by the following lines in which Hector goes on to envisage a scenario in which Andromache is spotted weaving at another loom, and a passer-by says of her "Look at that woman who used to be Hector's wife." Part of the hero's concern is that this would not be a great advertisement for his own *kleos*. And this importance of reputation is reflected in the choice of rhyme words by both Pope and Dryden:

Pope: Attaint the lustre of my former name,  
Should *Hector* basely quit the field of fame?

Dryden: With dangers dearly have I bought Renown,  
And am the Champion of my Father's Crown.  
... My Mother, nor my Brothers of Renown,  
Whose Valour yet defends th' unhappy Town.

If we were to look only at the line ends, only at the rhyme words (name/fame, Renown/Crown, Renown/Town), we would already be thinking about reputation and power, about the ties of family and city. The placement of these key words in the rhyme scheme makes them mnemonic hooks. This is not a direct parallel for the Homeric hexameter: if scholars like Milman Parry and Albert Lord could dismiss formulaic line ends as metrical padding, such formulae can hardly be 'key words' as such. Indeed it is often argued that in Homer key concepts are put at the *beginning* of a hexameter line. However, such key concepts are not the mnemonic hooks – the formulae are. And that is the point of comparison I want to make. Whether by rhyming key words or by metrical repetition, both the rhyming couplet and the Homeric hexameter take their poeticity from their line ends.

I have thus far grouped together Pope and Dryden, as two poets employing the same rhyme scheme. This is, in a way, overly simplistic: there are, of course, differences in their usage of the heroic couplet. But whether one comes closer to relaying in translation the aesthetics of the Homeric metre – and which one that might be – is up for debate (and is, essentially, subjective). Lynch (1982: 4) maintains that "Pope's couplets do more violence to the movement of Homer's poetry...Each couplet has a self-sufficiency that forces the reader to pause at its close. Dryden moves with a narrative energy similar to Homer's...the enjambment...requires the reader to move past the first line in order to complete the syntax." It should be noted,

however, that according to Higbie (1990: 66), around seventy five percent of Homer's lines can stand alone (i.e. have no necessary enjambment but are syntactically independent), a construction which scholars from Parry 1929 on have shown to be conducive to oral composition and performance. Surely, then, Pope's pauses do not really do much "violence" to the Homeric flow, but rather enact another feature of oral composition in his written rhyme scheme. Fagles (1990: 18), in his argument against "full formularity" in oral composition, writes: "A poet composing in a strict, demanding meter is bound to repeat syntactical combinations in identical positions and the stricter the meter, the higher the incidence of such repeated patterns. English has no meters as precisely demanding as Homer's, but Alexander Pope, to take an example, is rich in lines that by strict Parryite standards would qualify him as an illiterate bard." This is a particularly useful comparison, which highlights the importance of metrical scheme for our interpretation of a poem, its genre, its performance context – and our search for its author.

Pope writes in the Preface to his *Iliad*: "Nothing is more absurd or endless, than the common method of comparing eminent writers by an opposition of particular passages in them, and forming a judgment from thence of their merit upon the whole."<sup>33</sup> The scope of a single chapter has confined me to absurdity; but I hope to have shown that rhyme is indeed, as Oscar Wilde put it, a chord that the English poets added to the Greek lyre. It is a way of replicating the flow of the dactylic hexameter, of capturing that cadence that drives Homeric metre, of marking poeticity. Wolf and his successors have shown us that we are not on safe ground in talking about Homer the person, let alone his rich head and fine ear, as Pope describes them. Yet as Pope puts it, the Homeric poems "roll along as a plentiful river, always in motion, and always full; while we are born away by a tide of verse, the most rapid, and yet the most smooth imaginable."<sup>34</sup> In producing literal, free-verse translations, we may have left the smooth river far behind. Perhaps the rhyming couplet can help us get back there.

### III Pope: Poet and Critic

So far in this chapter I have focused on the heroic couplet in Pope and Dryden, and its relationship to Homeric translation. With Alexander Pope, we are perfectly placed to move now to offer some explicit reflections on the nexus between poetry and literary criticism, genre, and classical scholarship which informs this volume. Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, published in 1711, is a poetic didactic essay that looks back to classical authorities and gives advice to poets and to critics on poetry, in poetic form – the form of the heroic couplet, in fact. It remains to be noted that both Dryden and Pope engaged not only in writing poetry but also in literary criticism – and an examination of this *Essay* can help us to interrogate the distinctions, or indeed connections, between the two activities.

In Part 1 of his *Essay*, Pope warns:

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<sup>33</sup> Shankman (1996: 11).

<sup>34</sup> Shankman (1996: 10).

One science only will one genius fit;  
So vast is art, so narrow human wit:

Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, 60–1

Being both poet and critic is essentially problematic, as (according to Pope) man has the capacity to perfect but one craft. Where, then, does this leave Pope? Is he the exception that proves the rule? Or is one activity more central to his thought than the other? In his *Essay* he suggests a hierarchy between poetry and criticism:

Then criticism the Muse's handmaid prov'd,  
To dress her charms, and make her more belov'd;  
But following wits from that intention stray'd;  
Who could not win the mistress, woo'd the maid;  
Against the poets their own arms they turn'd,  
Sure to hate most the men from whom they learn'd.

Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, 102–7

The critics come second to the poets, abandoning (or being abandoned by) the Muse and turning on their teachers. Pope even comments specifically on literary criticism within classical scholarship, and depicts its deleterious effect on the classical works themselves:

Some on the leaves of ancient authors prey,  
Nor time nor moths e'er spoil'd so much as they:

Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, 112–13

He describes the ideal critic, setting up a paradigm to emulate, and claims that such critics did exist in the classical world:

But where's the man, who counsel can bestow,  
Still pleas'd to teach, and yet not proud to know?  
Unbias'd, or by favour or by spite;  
Not dully prepossess'd, nor blindly right;  
Though learn'd, well-bred; and though well-bred, sincere;  
Modestly bold, and humanly severe?  
Who to a friend his faults can freely show,  
And gladly praise the merit of a foe?  
Blest with a taste exact, yet unconfin'd;  
A knowledge both of books and human kind;  
Gen'rous converse; a soul exempt from pride;  
And love to praise, with reason on his side?

Such once were critics; such the happy few,  
Athens and Rome in better ages knew.

Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, 631–44

Yet literary critics, in their turn, have questioned Pope's own poetic credentials. Matthew Arnold, for example, argues: "though they may write in verse, though they may in a certain sense be masters of the art of versification, Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose."<sup>35</sup> This raises a question relevant to this study: to what extent is poetry defined and demarcated by "versification"?<sup>36</sup> Alfred S. West in his 1896 introduction to and commentary on Pope's *Essay* includes the chapter "Was Pope a Poet?" in which he isolates the main poetic 'problem' here: "The *Essay on Criticism*, like the *Essay on Man*, is a didactic poem, and some writers have denied that a didactic poem is a poem at all. For a didactic work is intended to convey instruction, and pleasure, not instruction, is the immediate end of poetry."<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, this statement is accompanied by the following footnote: "'Delight is the chief if not the only end of poesy: instruction can be admitted but in the second place; for poesy only instructs as it delights.'" (Dryden, *Defence of Essay on Dramatic Poesie*). Arnold brings our two poet-critics into alignment; West brings one to bear on the other; and indeed Pope borrows ideas and phrases from Dryden's literary-critical Prefaces throughout his *Essay*.

The *Essay on Criticism* is, just like Pope's *Iliad* translation, composed in heroic rhyming couplets, and from within this scheme Pope reflects on poets' use of metre and rhyme and critics' assessment of it. He chastises those critics who "by numbers judge a poet's song" (337), "Who haunt Parnassus but to please their ear" (341), who "equal syllables alone require" (344). He cites some clichéd "still expected rhymes" (349):

Where'er you find "the cooling western breeze",  
In the next line, it "whispers through the trees":  
If "crystal streams with pleasing murmurs creep",  
The reader's threaten'd (not in vain) with "sleep".

Pope, *Essay on Criticism* 350–4

– the implication being that though he writes in rhyme himself, he would never have recourse to such "unvaried chimes" (348). And Homer and Dryden both appear (the latter in, this time, his role as poet rather than critic), as counterpoints following this critique of rhyme for rhyme's sake:

'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,  
The sound must seem an echo to the sense.

...

When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,

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<sup>35</sup> *The Study of Poetry*, 1880.

<sup>36</sup> In line with the main aims of this volume, I confine my discussion here to the intersection between literary criticism and classical scholarship as it applies to versification. One could pursue the question also in cognitive terms: see for example Carminati *et al.* 2006, who set out research of which 'one of the key findings has been that the categorization of a text as a poem is determined primarily by its linguistic and textual features ... Such features include use of rhyme' (p.205).

<sup>37</sup> West (2014: 16–17).

The line too labours, and the words move slow;

...

The pow'r of music all our hearts allow,  
And what Timotheus was, is Dryden now.

Pope, *Essay on Criticism* 365–6, 371–2, 382–3

Pope uses the rhyming couplet in his didactic poetry, in his Homeric translation, and in his own (mock-) epic writings. It is not, then, the metre or rhyme scheme that marks generic distinctions in his work, but more thematic criteria. Similarly within the corpus of archaic Greek poetry: the hexameter was the unifying factor, within which 'genres' (or sub-genres, or 'modes')<sup>38</sup> could be distinguished. But as Arnold, so Aristotle:

οὐχ ὡς κατὰ τὴν μίμησιν ποιητὰς ἀλλὰ κοινῇ κατὰ τὸ μέτρον  
προσαγορεύοντες· καὶ γὰρ ἂν ἱατρικὸν ἢ φυσικὸν τι διὰ τῶν μέτρων  
ἐκφέρωσιν, οὕτω καλεῖν εἰώθασιν· οὐδὲν δὲ κοινόν ἐστιν Ὅμηρῳ καὶ  
Ἐμπεδοκλεῖ πλήν τὸ μέτρον, διὸ τὸν μὲν ποιητὴν δίκαιον καλεῖν, τὸν δὲ  
φυσιολόγον μᾶλλον ἢ ποιητήν·

Thus they do not call them poets in virtue of their representation but apply the name indiscriminately in virtue of the metre. For if people publish medical or scientific treatises in metre the custom is to call them poets. But Homer and Empedocles have nothing in common except the metre, so that it would be proper to call the one a poet and the other not a poet but a scientist.

Aristotle, *Poetics* 1447b

The relationship between versification and poetry; the question of utility versus pleasure; the marking of genre by metre or theme: these are persistent debates in classical scholarship, in literary criticism – and in poetry itself.

#### IV Rhyme Revisited: William Morris' *Odyssey*

The rhyming couplet in Homeric translation did not die out completely with Wolf. In 1887 a translation of the *Odyssey* in two volumes was published by the English poet and designer William Morris, and he chose to revive this rhyme scheme: though rather than adopting the heroic couplet, he used a longer line of his own invention, based on anapaests.<sup>39</sup> There was no dearth of *Odyssey* translations at this time: from Worsley's Spenserian stanzas and Lovelace Bigge-Wither's accentuated blank verse in the 1860s, to Du Cane and Palmer's translations in the early 1880s, there were plenty of contemporary versions with which that of Morris

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<sup>38</sup> Fowler 2003. On the changing fate of poetic genres, with reference to Pope, see Fowler 1979. On the ancient genre of didactic see further Canevaro 2014, Sider 2014. For more on the criticism of didactic poetry, see Dalzell 1996.

<sup>39</sup> Morris did begin a translation of the *Iliad* (see Whitla 2004), but it was left unfinished and unpublished. The *Iliad* was to be translated in the same metre as *Sigurd* and the *Odyssey*.

was vying. Morris' translation met with mixed reviews. Oscar Wilde praised it, as "of all our English translations this is the most perfect and the most satisfying,"<sup>40</sup> whilst Mowbray Morris disparaged it: "By this clumsy travesty of an archaic diction, Mr. William Morris...has overlaid Homer with all the grotesqueness, the conceits, the irrationality of the Middle Ages."<sup>41</sup> Most relevant to this chapter, Morshead felt there was a metrical gap which Morris' translation filled: "The couplets of Pope, the Spenserian stanzas of Worsley and Conington, form the high-water mark of what can be done...but the antitheses, the forced pauses, of the one, and the festooning of the separate stanzas, by the other, cancel a quality of the original."<sup>42</sup> In this section I consider why Morris went back to the rhyming couplet, and how he innovated on it. I ask how successful his translation was both as English literature and as a form of classical scholarship, and how it squared with the Post-Wolf idea of a Questioned Homer. According to Wilde, "Here we have a true work of art, a rendering not merely of language into language, but of poetry into poetry."<sup>43</sup> Wilde continues, describing Morris' translation as "not the fidelity of a pedant to his text but rather the fine loyalty of poet to poet,"<sup>44</sup> and Morris himself makes the very same claim in a letter of 1875: "I have translated as a poet and not as a pedant."<sup>45</sup> Can Morris' use of the rhyming couplet be seen as symptomatic of a retreat from philology to poetry? How does this fit with Morris' education, approach, and goals, and to what extent does it set his work apart from the unabashedly literary-critical activity of Dryden and Pope?

Mowbray Morris continues his invective against Morris' medievalism: "this grotesque manner was natural and common to the Elizabethan writers, and to Chapman in particular; with Mr. Morris it is but an extreme form of that affectation which plumes itself on despising the thoughts, manners, and needs of its own time, and is, in effect, the most odious shape that false culture can assume."<sup>46</sup> William Morris can be described, in many aspects of his life and work, as a man out of his time – whether looking back to a Chaucerian England or the Iceland of the Old Norse Sagas, or considering a utopian future like that envisaged in his novel *News from Nowhere*. And yet, he was simultaneously immersed in his time, sensitive to its problems and embroiled in its politics. Morris' daughter, May, writes: "Between the publication of Sigurd in the year 1877, and completion of the Odyssey in 1887, towards the end of August, much has happened. Ideas that lay at the back of my father's mind all through life have now come to the front and demand to be heard; his criticism on the life around him finds expression."<sup>47</sup> At this point, Morris was fully engaged in the socialist cause, giving speeches at mass protests and writing for

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<sup>40</sup> Pall Mall Gazette, April 26<sup>th</sup> 1887 (review of Volume I).

<sup>41</sup> The Quarterly Review, October 1888. Silvio Bär draws my attention to the recent German translation of the *Iliad* by Raoul Schrott, who describes all previous translations of the poem as 'travesties' (R. Schrott 2008, *Homer: Ilias*, Munich, p.xxxi).

<sup>42</sup> *Academy*, March 1888 xxxiii: 143–4 (review of Volume II).

<sup>43</sup> Pall Mall Gazette, April 26<sup>th</sup> 1887 (review of Volume I).

<sup>44</sup> Pall Mall Gazette, November 24<sup>th</sup> 1888 (review of Volume II).

<sup>45</sup> *Letters* vol. I: 275.

<sup>46</sup> The Quarterly Review, October 1888.

<sup>47</sup> In her introduction to *The Collected Works of William Morris* vol. XIII p.xv.



the *Commonweal*, and he hoped that he might make “a few pounds” from his *Odyssey* to fund his political pursuits. Indeed the writing of his *Odyssey* translation often had to be fitted around and slotted into his extra-literary activities: 110 lines written on a journey from London to Edinburgh in September 1886; two hours’ work on it between lectures in Glasgow; 50 lines on the return crossing after a heavy programme of speech-making with the Dublin Branch of the Socialist League. “That whole summer he travelled with his Homer in his knapsack, pulling it out like an enormous piece of knitting to occupy himself *en route*” (MacCarthy 1994: 541). It is of course compellingly apposite that the *Odyssey*, of all poems, should be written during one’s travels – but it is even more relevant that this particular poetic enterprise was interwoven with a political one. Though engrossed in Homeric epic and attempting to capture archaic diction, it is wholly inaccurate to say that Morris despised the needs of his own time. Rather than an “affectation” of “odious shape,” his archaising move can be read as part of a larger pattern of viewing modernity *through* antiquity. It is worth noting that at the same time as he was translating the *Odyssey* Morris was writing his novel *A Dream of John Ball* – a story about medieval Levellers, but used to reflect on the modern age and the socialist cause. Like *News from Nowhere*, the narrative frame is one of time travel. Whereas *News from Nowhere* takes us forward, *A Dream of John Ball* takes us back – and yet, in both cases it is the present day that is cast in a bleak light. Morris does not “despise” the needs of his own day: he critiques them, through the comparative lens offered by other times and other cultures.<sup>48</sup>

Morris’ ability to look back and forward whilst simultaneously engaging with his own time is reflected in his approach to the classics, and in particular to epic poetry. Composing poems that stretched to 42,000 lines apiece (in the case of *The Earthly Paradise*, the longest narrative poem in the English language), Morris was himself an epic poet: and he saw himself as operating within a tradition that included Homeric and Virgilian epic as well as the Norse sagas. As MacCarthy (1994: 54) notes, “Morris’s view of the classics was eccentric and possessive. He was always deeply stirred by the thought of epic tale-tellers, seeing himself as a part of that tradition. Later in his life he would set about translating *The Aeneid* and *The Odyssey* with a kind of nonchalance derived from loving them so much and knowing them so well.” Similarly, Boos (1984: 26) writes: “Morris was nearly unique among Victorian poets in his view of the *poet as historian*: not a romantic individual, but one among a *community* of artists, living and dead, who have borne the immense responsibility of narration and creation.” He inserts himself into a tradition, taking on the mantle of epic storyteller. Asked by the Pall Mall Gazette to come up with his List of the Hundred Best Books, Morris chose “the kind of book which Mazzini called ‘Bibles,’”<sup>49</sup> including Homer, Hesiod, the English Bible, the *Edda*, *Beowulf*, the *Kalevala*, *Shah-nameh*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Nibelungenlied*. In the notes to his list he wrote: “They are in no sense the work of individuals, but have grown up from the very hearts of the *people*”<sup>50</sup> – and this is a key point, to which I shall return. Interestingly, Morris left his list at 54. Vaninskaya (2010: 65) speculates that Morris

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<sup>48</sup> On the “meeting of past and future in William Morris” see Frye 1982.

<sup>49</sup> *Letters* Vol. II Part B: 515.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

was committed to filling up the forty-six remaining spaces himself, with individually produced bibles of the people.

Morris did not champion Homer the Man – Dryden and Pope’s Homer of “rich head” and “fine ear” – but rather Homer the Tradition, in line with Wolf and with the emerging oral-traditional approach to epic poetry. And yet, somehow, he still favoured the rhyming couplet. There must, therefore, be more to this scheme than capturing the “spirit” or intention of an original author, as Pope would profess. I suggest that we therefore reconsider the rhyming couplet here in terms of its potential for traditionality, and for genre recognition. I also suggest that we consider the relevance of the rhyming couplet to Morris at that particular time. He had, after all, written poetic “Scenes from the Fall of Troy” much earlier in his life (including that of the parting of Hector and Andromache), but did not compose them in the metrical scheme of his later *Odyssey* – a poem that, I shall argue, was more poetically and politically informed.

Wilde comments on the rhyme scheme of Morris’ *Odyssey*: “in his desire for rushing and ringing metre, he has occasionally sacrificed majesty to movement, and made stateliness give place to speed; but it is really only in such blank verse as Milton’s that this effect of calm and lofty music can be attained, and in all other respects blank verse is the most inadequate medium for reproducing the full flow and fervour of the Greek hexameter.”<sup>51</sup> This recalls Pope’s statement with which I started, that Homer’s own dactylic hexameter is able “to run along with the warmth of his rapture,” and reinforces my earlier point about the value of rhymed over unrhymed lines in translating Homer. Morris captures the feel and flow of the original, channeling the Homeric hexameter through his own couplets: couplets with a longer line than the Augustan heroic metre, closer in length, in fact, to the Homeric line. In Wilde’s words, not only is rhyme “the one chord we have added to the Greek lyre,” but Morris’ use of it has shown “that our English speech may be a pipe through which Greek lips can blow.”<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, though, Wilde also calls Morris’ *Odyssey* “rather Norse than Greek.”<sup>53</sup> It would seem that, to Wilde at least, the traditional feel of this translation is not restricted to one tradition, but can convey something of the “essence” of epic poetry. Importantly, Morris translated the *Odyssey* in the same metre as he had used for his 1876 *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs*. Through this metrical unity, Morris marks out a genre: a genre of epic poetry that crosses cultures, much like his List of Best Books.

Morris’ approach to formulae is strikingly modern. Earlier in this chapter I traced a development from reverence for formulae because of the looming figure of Homer, through their dismissal because of the oral-traditional reductive principle of economy, to post-Parry attempts to redeem particular uses. Morris is post-Wolf (not just chronologically but, as we have seen, in his allegiance with traditionality), and yet he claimed that part of the *Odyssey*’s “great simplicity” is that it has no redundant

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<sup>51</sup> Pall Mall Gazette, April 26<sup>th</sup> 1887 (review of Volume I). Morris himself had a strong view on Milton’s poetry: “the union in his works of cold classicalism with Puritanism (the two things which I hate most in the world) repels me so that I *cannot* read him.” *Letters* Vol. II Part B: 517.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

words, no words without a precise meaning.<sup>54</sup> Formulae are not treated as redundant, but as having weight. And indeed this fits with Morris' approach to epic, as the weight of formulae is the accumulated weight of tradition.

The search for the essence of epic, for the story, is something that characterises Morris' education – both his classical studies at Oxford, and his later forays into Icelandic. Writing from Oxford, Morris groaned: "My life is going to become a burden to me, for I am going, (beginning from Tuesday next) to read for six hours a day at Livy, Ethics, &c. – please pity me."<sup>55</sup> Yet as MacCarthy (1994: 54) argues, "his hatred of the classics in fact was only nominal. He did not hate the classics, but he loathed how Oxford taught them." Similarly, Morris' teacher in Icelandic, Eiríkr Magnússon, describes how his pupil was averse to memorising grammatical paradigms – because his interest lay elsewhere. "No, I can't be bothered with grammar," Morris said to his instructor. "I want the literature, I must have the story."<sup>56</sup> And yet his professed grammatical aversion did not preclude a deep interest in and affinity for words and language. MacCarthy (1994: 291) describes Morris' Icelandic translation as "a word-game, an Anglo-Icelandic Scrabble, which often had the two of them [Morris and his teacher] chortling with delight." It seems to me that Morris played a similar game with Homeric translation, playing close attention to and playing with the Greek original. Morshead in his 1888 review of the second volume of Morris' *Odyssey* challenges those critics who attacked Morris' 'mannerisms':

My strong impression is that half these 'mannerisms'...are more careful approximations to Homer's manner than some critics have discerned. As to the 'Phaeacians oar-fain' (p.232, l.36) for Φαιήκεσσι ἐίληρετμοισι what is the objection? We speak of a person as 'heart-sick', of Carlyle as 'world-weary', without scruple or blame; why may not the Phaeacians be 'oar-fain'? Homer calls them so by a compound, not a periphrasis. Suppose 'oar-fain' is not elsewhere used in English literature – well, somebody once used 'heart-sick', or 'world-weary', for the first time.

This encapsulates perfectly Morris' approach to translating Homeric noun-epithet formulae. He recognises the compound as being characteristic of Homeric adjectives, and faithfully renders it with a compound also in English when possible. He is criticised for stretching what is possible, as many of these English compounds are his own coinages – but his loyalty to Homeric language, patterning, and cadence is clear. The fact that he coins new terms to represent the most fundamental elements of ancient epic diction is not a jarring incongruity but rather representative of Morris'

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<sup>54</sup> MacCarthy (1994: 562).

<sup>55</sup> *Letters* Vol. I: 23, to Cornell Price 29<sup>th</sup> September 1855.

<sup>56</sup> Recounted by Eiríkr Magnússon in the Preface to *The Stories of the Kings of Norway* (*Heimskringla*), translated by William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon, vol. 4 (London: Quaritch 1905), xiii. See also *The Collected Works of William Morris Vol.VII* p.xvi-xvii in which May Morris relays the account given to her by Magnússon of their working method ("Owing both to other literary occupations and to pressure of business engagements Morris decided from the beginning to leave alone the irksome task of taking regular grammatical exercises.").

active engagement with – and insertion of himself into – the epic tradition. And after all, there are sufficient *hapax legomena* in the Homeric poems to suppose a certain number of coinages there too.

Let us examine Morris' approach to Homeric translation through one selected passage. As a complement to the parting of Hector and Andromache, I have chosen part of the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope (Book 23): the test of the bed, another pivotal and poignant scene. To probe and prove the identity of her restored husband, Penelope gives him a task that Odysseus would know to be impossible: to move their marital bed, which he had built around a tree and thus fixed in place.

ὥς ἄρ' ἔφη πόσιος πειρωμένη· αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς  
ὀχθήσας ἄλοχον προσεφώνεε κεδνὰ εἰδυῖαν·  
“ὦ γύναι, ἧ μάλα τοῦτο ἔπος θυμαλγὲς ἔειπες.  
τίς δέ μοι ἄλλοσε θῆκε λέχος; χαλεπὸν δέ κεν εἴη  
καὶ μάλ' ἐπισταμένῳ, ὅτε μὴ θεὸς αὐτὸς ἐπελθὼν  
ῥηιδίως ἐθέλων θείῃ ἄλλῃ ἐνὶ χώρῃ.  
ἀνδρῶν δ' οὐ κέν τις ζῶδς βροτός, οὐδὲ μάλ' ἡβῶν,  
ῥεῖα μετοχλίσσειεν, ἐπεὶ μέγα σῆμα τέτυκται  
ἐν λέχει ἀσκητῶ· τὸ δ' ἐγὼ κάμον οὐδέ τις ἄλλος.  
θάμνος ἔφυ τανύφυλλος ἐλαίης ἔρκεος ἐντός,

*Odyssey* 23.181–90

This is Morris' translation in rhyming couplets:

Thus she spake to prove her husband; but Odysseus, grieved at heart,  
Spake thus unto his bed-mate well-skilled in gainful art:  
“O woman, thou sayest a word exceeding grievous to me!  
Who hath otherwise shifted my bedstead? full hard for him should it be,  
For as deft as he were, unless smoothly a very God come here,  
Who easily, if he willed it, might shift it elsewhere.  
But no mortal man is living, how strong soe'er in his youth,  
Who shall lightly hale it elsewhere, since a mighty wonder forsooth  
Is wrought in that fashioned bedstead, and I wrought it, and I alone.  
In the close grew a thicket of olive, a long-leaved tree full-grown

And for comparison, Fagles' 1996 translation of the same passage:

Putting her husband to the proof – but Odysseus  
blazed up in fury, lashing out at his loyal wife:  
“Woman – your words, they cut me to the core!  
Who could move my bed? Impossible task,  
even for some skilled craftsman – unless a god  
came down in person, quick to lend a hand,  
lifted it out with ease and moved it elsewhere.  
Not a man on earth, not even at peak strength,  
would find it easy to prise it up and shift it, no,  
a great sign, a hallmark lies in its construction.

I know, I built it myself – no one else...  
There was a branching olive-tree inside our court

I have intentionally chosen a passage with relatively few formulaic noun-epithet pairings (κεδνὰ ἰδυῖαν five times in the *Odyssey*, τανύφυλλος ἐλαίης four times), as I would like to move away from my earlier mode of analysis and consider Morris' translation from a broader perspective. The first general observation to make is that the translation is, in fact, very literal – unlike those of Pope and Dryden. Despite his professed aversion to grammar, Morris traces the Greek text closely. One compelling example from word choice is “bed-mate:” a perfectly apt translation for ἄλοχον here, as it is not only more literal than “wife” (as Fagles translates), but it also captures the essence of the text itself. But it is in terms of word order that Morris' translation really excels – and differs from the heroic couplets that we have considered. Morris does not follow Dryden and Pope in placing key concepts at the rhyming line end, but rather follows Homer's ordering. For example, the concept on which this passage hinges is the μέγα σῆμα – the great sign which the bed constitutes, Morris' “mighty wonder.” This is not placed at the end of the line, the emphatic position within this rhyme scheme (Fagles chooses to topicalise it), but is followed by an emphatic, if superfluous, “forsooth” – just as τέτυκται completes the final two feet of the Homeric hexameter. Similarly, the line end χαλεπὸν δέ κεν εἶη is rendered as “full hard for him should it be,” keeping the verb at the very end, by contrast with Fagles' “Impossible task” which grabs the attention yet omits the verb entirely. And again, θεὸς αὐτὸς ἐπελθὼν is translated as “a very God come here” – much more faithful to the end-stopped structure of the Homeric hexameter than Fagles' run-on “unless a god I came down in person,” and with no attempt to relocate the god to emphatic position at the rhyming end of the line. Perhaps the most striking adherence to the original arrangement is evident in the fact that the end of the final couplet I have quoted from Morris does not coincide with the end of the narrative unit, but the natural break in sense cuts through the couplet. In taking the Morris quotation to the end of the rhyme pair, therefore, the other versions quoted stop *in medias res*.

So what does all this tell us about Morris' approach to Homeric translation? In his review of the first volume of Morris' *Odyssey*, Morshead presented the conundrum: “the question of the true metre for translating Homer, like the question of free will, ‘finds no end, in wandering mazes lost’.”<sup>57</sup> Why did Morris choose the rhyming couplet, and why did he invent a form different from the heroic couplet used by Pope and Dryden? I argued in part II that Pope and Dryden employ the heroic couplet in a way that is not entirely faithful to Homer's Greek in the sense of being a word-for-word translation, but that they use the tools offered by this metrical scheme (antithesis and balance; word order and especially emphatic positioning) to capture the cadence of the Homeric hexameter. And this fits with the overarching aim of capturing the “warmth of Homer's rapture;” his “notions;” his “rich head” and “fine ear.” It was a way of uncovering and presenting the intention of an (assumed) author. Morris, by contrast, produced a much more literal, line-by-line and word-for-word translation, shaping the rhyming couplet (even lengthening it to

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<sup>57</sup> *Academy*, April 1887 xxxi: 299.

something different from and indeed more than the heroic couplet) to fit the Greek word order and not the other way round. What mattered to Morris was not Homer's intention but the story that grew "from the very hearts of the people." He saw himself as part of the epic tradition – contributing to it through his own poetic compositions, but also transmitting it, acting as a conduit for it, bringing Homeric epic (as well as Virgilian and Icelandic) to new audiences. These two projects – composition and translation – were very different for Morris, and his literal rendering of the Homeric text is indicative of that separation. We might contrast, for example, his *Life and Death of Jason*: a poem on a classical theme, but clearly a literary reworking and not a straight translation. We can trace here a spectrum of poetic activity, which maps onto varying levels of engagement with and proximity to a (classical) poetic inheritance. However, in using a metrical scheme that had much in common with and yet was not the heroic couplet, Morris makes the point that he is placing himself in the tradition of Homer – and *not* the tradition of Dryden and Pope.

The story of the people mattered to Morris more keenly than ever during his Odyssean period, as it was also the time of his most intense socialist engagement. His choice of metrical scheme, then, is likely to have been coloured primarily by his poetic principles: his longing for the story, and his prizing of tradition. As Wilde wrote: "Of all our modern poets, Mr. William Morris is the one best qualified by nature and by art to translate for us the marvellous epic of the wanderings of Odysseus. For he is our only true story-singer since Chaucer; if he is a Socialist, he is also a Saga-man."<sup>58</sup> It is no coincidence that, as I already noted above, Morris had used this particular kind of couplet already in *Sigurd*.<sup>59</sup> The rhyming couplet was chosen, not as a way to find *Homer*, but as a way to unite the modern reader with "the very hearts of the people" from which the epic tradition grew – much as *A Dream of John Ball* leads us from modernity to the medieval past. For Morris, the rhyming couplet was another way to travel in time. As Whitla (2004: 84) puts it, for Morris "the act of translation is a political act of cultural recuperation." MacCarthy 1994:563 notes that "He was not, after all, in the academic rat-race" – currents in classical scholarship were not the main impetus behind his translation practices. Though Pope's dictum "One science only will one genius fit" surely applies to writer-politician-designer Morris far less than to most, it was poetry, rather than literary criticism, that emerges as his foremost "science." And yet, as an educated, cultured and classically trained man with a lively correspondence, he was not unaware of academic debates, nor did he refrain from commenting on them. Disengagement from classical scholarship sits as uncomfortably with Morris as with Pope. As Morris remarks in his *Political Writings*: "modern research has made Homer a dim and doubtful shadow to us, while it has added clearness to our vision of the life of the people of that time, who were the real authors of the Homeric poems."<sup>60</sup> Morris' metre, his translation practice, expresses what he believes scholarship to have discovered: the people as poet.

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<sup>58</sup> The Pall Mall Gazette, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1887, xlv: 5.

<sup>59</sup> Indeed, *Sigurd* was in this sense sandwiched between *Odyssey* versions: in 1873 Morris wrote a draft invocation to the *Odyssey*, which although radically altered in the 1887 version was already composed in the characteristic rhyming anapestic hexameters.

<sup>60</sup> *Political Writings* 277–8.

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